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Inside information for comic dealers and collectors!

#9

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January 1995

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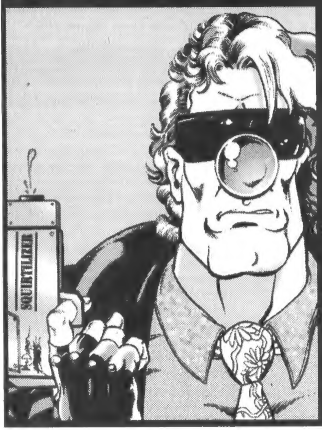

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VANTAGE™
COMIC & CARD PICKS
number nine

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Special thanks to our advisors!

Vantage Comic & Card Picks
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TOP PICK OF THE MONTH

Uncanny X-Men #105-108 (Marvel / After Xavier tie-in / 1st M'Kraan Crystal)
X-Factor #5-6 (Marvel / After Xavier tie-in / 1st Apocalypse)
X-Men Deluxe #41 (Marvel / X-Men / After Xavier tie-in)

MORE VANTAGE PICKS

Watch for the Vantage Star indicating our top picks!

Amazing Spider-Man #400 (Marvel / Spider-done tie-in / a Parker dies)
Men In Black #1-3; #1-3, Book Two (Malibu / Aircel / future movie?)
Prime #1-up (Malibu / Ultraverse / future animated TV show?)
Prophet #1 (Image / Extreme / Platt & Dixon)
The Spectre, all Silver Age issues
(DC Comics / growing readership)
The Spectre, #1-up
(DC Comics / growing readership)
Star Trek: Deep Space Nine #0
(Malibu / Licensing / Star Trek)
Starslayer #1-up (Pacific & First Comics / Mike Grell / 1st Starslayer)
Tekno Phone Cards
(Big Ent. / Tekno•Comix / limited to 5000)
Ultraforce #1-up
(Marvel / Malibu / Ultraverse / future animated TV show?)
Wolverine Deluxe #90 (Marvel / X-Men / death of Wolvie or Sabre?)
X-Titles, all #1s (Marvel / X-Men family / After Xavier)

"The above pick list is a guide based on research, advisors' opinions, and staff opinions — keep in mind that even the experts will disagree. Comics can lose value after months or years. Read over the facts and opinions in Vantage, examine the pick list, and then make your own decisions. Remember: 1) There's no sure thing. Never bet the farm on any one book. 2) It may be fun to hunt for winners, but comics are even more fun to read! Open up one of those polybags and give comics a try!"
- Publisher Rob Golub

THE SIZE OF ROB'S MOUTH

Comics have become as crazy a business as ever. When we started **Vantage** on a shoe-string budget, our goal was to better inform collectors and small dealers so they could outwit the big dealers. This was in the day and age of the Valiant and Image boom.

Since then, **Vantage** has grown from a little mail-order newsletter into the fastest-growing magazine in comics. While other publishers complain of sagging numbers, our circulation at times remains steady, and at times spikes upward. **Vantage** is a success, even though it covers the market.

The irony here is that comic publishers' sagging numbers are often blamed on the fact that many speculators have left the comics industry, and so, the logic goes, publishers should ignore the marketplace, top ten lists, and price guides. I could not disagree more.

Suppose you are a lamp manufacturer. You produce a lamp that is very attractive, but it does a poor job of lighting up a room. Will it sell? No. Suppose you produce a lamp that is just ugly, but it provides great lighting. Will it sell? No. Neither lamp will sell, because neither lamp satisfies the consumer. To satisfy the consumer, your product often has to appeal to more than just one need.

So it goes with comic books. A comic that's just a great read, or one that just has market appeal, often only goes so far. People want to feel like its worthwhile to "bag and board" the comic they just bought and read, to add to the feeling that their comic is something special. These people are not speculators. These are readers who love the back-issue market.

Publishers should make comic books that are fun to read, with great art and great writing. I think that publishers should also look for ways to interest the back-issue market in their books (the majority already do, to varying degrees). The realities of political correctness in comics are such that when publishers take these steps, they cannot admit to them, and I am certainly not going to blow their cover.

So here I am, in front of thousands of people, opening up my big mouth on the issue. Ah well, I never was the most popular kid.

—Rob Golub
Publisher

TEKNO HAS MUFFINS IN THE OVEN

Upstart publisher Tekno•Comix has two muffins in the oven that could be nice and hot once fully baked. (Okay, we know it's not the world's greatest metaphor, but give us a break here. How many different ways can we say a comic is about to get hot?)

Muffin Number One: Tekno Bakes A Secret Flavor

Tekno•Comix is finalizing negotiations with a top comic book artist to pencil and ink the cover(s) to **Mickey Spillane's Mike Danger.** The super-hot artist would come as a surprise to advance-orderers who would not be informed in the catalogs.

As one of the company's lower profile and non-science fiction books, we expect **Mike Danger** orders to be strong (due to the heavy promotion), but not wild and crazy. Though the deal is not yet finalized, it could hit this book right out of the ball park. **Vantage** will keep you posted.

Muffin Number Two: Tekno Doesn't Bake Enough

You've probably seen one of the two million phone cards from Tekno. That's not a joke. There really are two million of them. They are everywhere — catalogs, stores, magazines, and so on. Response has been tremendous.

Within a week of the cards' initial release, Tekno told **Vantage** that they had handled over two thousand phone calls placed through the cards. But that's not what's gotten us all hot and bothered about Tekno phone cards.

You see, we're excited about the other Tekno phone cards. Sure, we like those two million jobbies just fine, but try this one on for size: In addition to the two million, there are different-looking, almost-free Tekno phone cards floating around out there with print runs limited to 5000! Quite an improvement, eh?

There will be a phone card for each Tekno title, with a limit of 5000 produced per card. In other words, there'll be 5000 **Mr. Hero** cards, 5000 **Mike Danger** cards, and so on. These cards will sell in stores for ten bucks a pop, but they'll have ten dollars worth of phone time on'em.

These cards, then, if you ever use a pay phone, are more or less free. **Vantage** suggests you pick one up, but don't just cram that muffin in your pocket. You'll want to keep this little pastry in perfect shape.

Mickey Spillane's Mike Danger ™ & © 1994 Comico, The Comic Company

COMING SOON...

#1995!

THE 1995 PUBLISHER SPECIAL FROM VANTAGE

SPECTRE MOVES TOWARDS TOP 100!

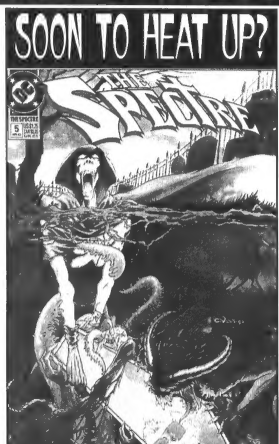
DC's **The Spectre** has been quietly moving up the top comics list for months, showcasing superior writing and beautifully painted covers, with demand for back-issues increasing monthly.

The Spectre's placement on Capital City Distribution's Top Comics list tells the story best. In September 1993, **The Spectre** #12 was the 181st best-selling comic. Ten months later, in July of 1994, **The Spectre** #22 improved to 149. Sales grew once more as the September issue was ranked at 136. Finally, this November, Capital City Distribution reported that **The Spectre** #25 hit an impressive 127.

Clearly, the book seems poised to enter the list of the top 100 best-selling comics. In today's highly competitive market, this is a very notable achievement.

Dealers around the nation have reported to **Vantage** that they are seeing an increased demand for **The Spectre** back-issues. This comes from readers who have jumped on board in recent months, hunting for the back-issues that were printed months ago (which are now largely owned by collectors/readers, not dealers). Obviously, the potential for heat is real.

The Spectre is a powerful comic, well written by John Ostrander with lovely art from Tom Mandrake. That's what keeps the readers. However, what pulls them in are the gorgeous painted covers from great artists like Greg Hildebrandt (Marvel Masterpieces), Alex Ross (Marvels), and Bill Sienkiewicz (Iotsa stuff). These amazing covers look like they should be going for five or ten bucks a pop, but most guides still list them at cover.



The Spectre is a fascinating story, due in part to the fact that the central character is a mystery. Somehow, Ostrander weaves a plot that makes us care about the Spectre, while keeping us from getting inside of him. We're left wondering not only how the Spectre will beat the bad guys, but also what the heck this Spectre guy is all about anyway.

The Spectre often defeats his enemies by visually confronting them with their own sins. This is always a great part of the story; Ostrander and Mandrake handle it with style. The reader can't help but stop and gape at Mandrake's sweeping drawing of the Spectre's unearthly powers in use.

To give you some of the flavor of **The Spectre** read some of this great dialogue from **The Spectre** #5, after the Spectre surprisingly defeats the Devil in battle:

Spectre: I have what I came for, Lord of Lies. Thank you for your gracious entertainment.

Devil: (in pain) Wait. There is a Legend in Hell… of a Prince of the damned… who repented his rebellion… that a devil… melded with a human host… and roams the Earth in service to Heaven. Are you… the Lord of Wrath? Would you… know if you were?

Spectre: I am what I am. What I would be is a fool if I listened to anything that a lord of lies said.

Devil: To sow doubt, create confusion, to foster chaos, I would stoop to even the truth. For how will you ever know it is not the truth indeed?

Reading **The Spectre** makes **Vantage** think of those early **Sandman** or **Animal Man** issues. Whether you're in search of a great read or a strong pick, **The Spectre** is looking good.

The Spectre and cover artwork TM & © 1994 DC Comics, Inc.

X-UPDATE & TOP PICKS: M'KRAAN CRYSTAL AND APOCALYPSE!

What if Professor X was killed — back in time — before he formed the X-Men? What if this really happened — what if it wasn't a What If?

"After Xavier: The Age of Apocalypse" continues this storyline that has reset the clock on the best-selling line of comics in the world. As regular **Vantage** readers already know, **X-Men: Alpha** kicks off the storyline that has inspired Marvel to restart all of the X-titles as new number ones with new names.

Vantage has pieced the overall story together as follows: Legion goes back in time to kill Magneto. Somehow, it is Professor Xavier who gets killed by mistake instead (in **X-Men** #41, our Top Pick of the Month from last issue). This changes the time line drastically, for the mutants will now have been organized under Magneto for decades.

The new reality is a harsher world for mutants, and perhaps for humans as well. This timeline is a world with genetic slave pens, where humans must evacuate North America, and the threat of full-scale Armageddon looms over humans and mutants alike.

Early on, Lila Cheney arrives on Earth and brings some of the X-heroes out to space to meet the Starjammers, just as she did in **Uncanny X-Men** #105-108. Also, just as in #105 to #108, the M'Kraan crystal plays a major role in the After Xavier storyline, as **Vantage** predicted

Logo Indoor, Wolverine and X-Men TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

last issue. The relevance of the M'Kraan crystal has now been officially confirmed by Marvel's publicity department. Thus, we are promoting #105-108 to Top Pick of the Month status.

Speaking of Top Picks of the Month, **Vantage** has learned that the Earth's Mutants will enter into a full-scale war with Apocalypse and his deadly servants during the storyline. Hence the name: "After Xavier: The Age of Apocalypse." Apocalypse is a baddie who has been increasing in importance over the past several years.

X-UPDATE & TOP PICKS (continued)

With interest riding incredibly high for this storyline, many fans will surely become curious enough to pick up some Apocalypse back-issues. His first appearances make for great Top Picks of the Month: **X-Factor** #5 has a shadow-cameo and **X-Factor** #6 marks his first appearance. These are two important books that commonly go for just a couple bucks a pop. Other Apocalypse back issues are also important, including the X-Cutioners Song crossover (remember crossovers?) that ran through **Uncanny X-Men** #294-296 and a whole bunch of other X-books.

Other items of interest ... Destiny suffers premonitions of fire and slaughter, Holocaust shows up, Scott Summers betrays his "father" (Mr. Sinister) and possibly his brother Alex, a new powerful young mutant is discovered, the Shi'ar Empire gets involved, and Marvel publishes two special one-shots: **Apocalypse Strike Files** (further confirming the importance of Apocalypse) and **X-Men: Alpha Gold** #1 (an unprecedented offering of a gold edition to the general public for $49.95 retail).

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MARVEL BUYS MALIBU!

Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. has agreed to acquire privately-held Malibu Comics Entertainment Group, Inc., a move that instantly increases Marvel market share and bolsters Malibu's credibility.

Financial terms were not disclosed. Malibu was a closely-held private corporation, with the majority of stock held by its president, Scott Rosenberg. Marvel is a publicly-traded company, with a majority of the stock held by financier Ronald Perelman.

Malibu started with one title in 1986. Today, Malibu competes with Valiant and Dark Horse for the number four spot, publishing Ultraverse, Bravura, Deep Space Nine, Star Trek: Voyager, Mortal Kombat, and BattleTech comic books.

Malibu and its 100 employees will remain in Calabasas, California. Malibu titles will continue to be solicited in catalogs like **Advance Comics** and **Previews** separately from Marvel titles under the Malibu imprint, Malibu Creative Director Tom Mason told **Vantage.** The Marvel logo will not appear on Malibu titles and the Malibu marketing department will remain autonomous, Mason said.

"We believe the comic book industry is ripe for a new generation of growth and this is one of the first of many steps we plan to take to lead the charge," said Terry Stewart, President and Chief Operating Officer, Marvel Entertainment Group. "Our market research tells us that there's tremendous interest in comic books on the part of consumers of all ages. Taking advantage of Marvel's strong position and now Malibu's, we plan to continue to aggressively expand our presence in the industry."

"We are absolutely determined to make a dramatic impact in the comic book industry," said Malibu's Rosenberg. "We will capitalize on Marvel's financial and marketing muscle to make this happen. Our merger launches a new era."

Malibu will continue its daily operations, including its state-of-the-art computerized comic book coloring operation. This will facilitate Marvel's launch of other, differentiated publishing programs based on West Coast, said Marvel.

One of the first of these new programs will be Excelsior Comics, the new imprint to come from Marvel-god Stan Lee.

William C. Bevens, Jr., President and CEO, Marvel Entertainment, said, "The Malibu acquisition continues a program designed to expand, strengthen and diversify Marvel's youth entertainment publishing operation with powerful market positions and products for a broad range of demographic groups. Marvel Comics is already firmly established with Super Hero comics for a core audience of 9-16 year-olds. Malibu enhances our positioning with slightly-older readers, and, together with Marvel Comics, gives us approximately a 40% unit share of the total comic book market."

Malibu will report directly to Terry Stewart, through Scott Rosenberg, who will become a Senior Executive Vice President of Marvel Comics. Marvel's statement added that Malibu "fits in well with how Marvel is reorganizing its editorial line-up into discrete groups of titles centered around X-Men, the most popular Super Hero group in comics; Spider-Man, the most popular Super Hero in comics; the Marvel Universe; and General Entertainment, which includes comics based on licenses from Disney, Harvey, Mattel, and others."

Spider-Man TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.
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WHO WINS WHEN MARVEL BUYS MALIBU?

When Marvel buys Malibu who wins? The winners are definitely Malibu and its owners, maybe Marvel and its owners, and probably the fans. Malibu wins because Malibu suddenly has more credibility, since Marvel has an almost endless source of cash to push them forward.

The bottom line for Malibu is that even if sales drop for the Ultraverse, revenue from (for example) X-Men licensing can still pay for the marketing and publishing of the Ultraverse, until it gets back on its feet. The benefit to fans and dealers who hold Malibu back-issues could be tremendous. This benefit goes all the way back to pre-Ultraverse titles.

This especially applies to **Men in Black**, the title given to a pair of Malibu minis published under the Aircel imprint. Columbia has secured the right to have **Men in Black** turned into a movie, with Walter F. Parkes as the producer. Parkes is the guy who produced *Sneakers* with Robert Redford. Though an "option" is no guarantee that a movie will be made, the acquisition by Marvel makes it all the more likely.

Since sales for the industry have fallen in general, Malibu's owners may have been wise to bail out before getting crushed by the storm that Marvel can more easily weather. We'll give them ten out of ten benefit points.

For Marvel, the benefit is instant market share, a place to put Stan and his new imprint (Stan hangs out in California, making movie deals — great job so far, eh?), and a West Coast presence to pull in artists and writers who work in the area (Can you say "Image"?), and one more way of telling the industry that Marvel is THE comic book company.

Also, Malibu is a well-run company with very strong marketing, publicity, and editorial departments. Though Marvel is no slouch, they would do well to pick the brains of the company that essentially stole five percentage points from them.

Marvel is run by corporate America, while Malibu is run by guys who started with nothing just nine years ago, and who are more accustomed to an entrepreneurial style of doing business. This combination of expertise just might result in better comic books for the fans, better marketing and sales for retailers, and better business for Marvel and Malibu.

For more on the Marvel/Malibu deal, see this issue's View From Oblivion column.

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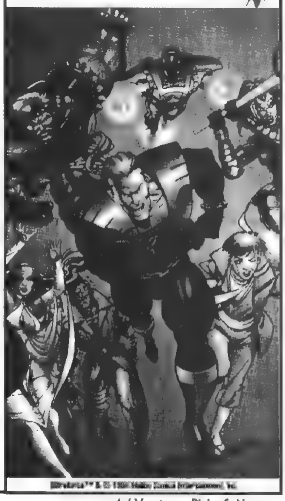
Malibu Logo™ & © 1994 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

Malibu Finalizing Cartoon Agreement

Malibu is finalizing an agreement with a major animation company to produce an animated TV show based on UltraForce, according to a Marvel Comics statement.

Malibu's UltraForce would become Marvel's fifth animated TV show after X-Men, currently in its third season on Fox; Iron Man and Fantastic Four, which premiered in September in first run syndication; and Spider-Man, which is expected to debut as a special in November on Fox. In honor of the reported animation deal and the increased credibility now attributable to Malibu Comics, **Vantage** once more makes **Prime** and **UltraForce** comics picks.



Ultraforce™ & © 1994 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

DEFALCO OUT OF THE LOOP!

"MARVELUTION" TO CHANGE COMPANY!

Tom DeFalco has been removed as Editor-in-Chief and top Marvel editors now report directly to COO Terry Stewart as part of a new program called "Marvelution," according to statements issued by Marvel.

Former Editor-in-Chief Tom DeFalco has been promoted to Senior Vice President of Publishing where he will oversee international publishing and TV/Media related titles. The revered Editor-in-Chief position at Marvel, having been filled only by Stan Lee, Jim Shooter, and then Tom DeFalco, is now but a part of comic book history.

Marvel has accepted the fact that they cannot shut out their competitors, so they are getting into the mud with them, to do battle mini-universe to mini-universe.

The company has entered a stage of "Marvelution," where distinct editorial departments replace the old system of centralization under one Editor-in-Chief. Each of these mini-companies will be headed by an Executive Editor who will have complete editorial autonomy. The four mini-companies/departments will be X-Men, Spider-Man, Marvel Universe, and General Entertainment. "Each of these mini-companies will have a special 'launch' of its own in 1995, featuring a new storyline intended to clearly position the title group or theme, and to emphasize the relationship between the titles," said Mike Martin, Marvel West Coast Representative. Marvel has not yet described how newly-purchased Malibu Comics will fit in with Marvelution.

Marvelution is clearly part of Marvel's continuing attempts to categorize their titles, so as to allow the consumer who cannot afford to read the books in every category to focus on one or two. Marvel has accepted the fact that they cannot shut out their competitors, so they are getting into the mud with them, to do battle mini-universe to mini-universe.

Indeed, Marvel said the purpose of all of this is "to differentiate their titles, in response to popular belief that there is more product clutter than ever in the marketplace." Marvelution is the company's response to existing publishers expanding their lines, new publishers offering new products, speculators leaving the market, and an overwhelming amount of choice for comic fans, said Marvel's Matt Ragone, Vice President, Direct Market. The company must declutter itself to make its comics more readable and marketable.

Yes, Marvelution should also allow Marvel to concentrate advertising and marketing more cost-effectively on whole categories rather than individual books. For example, an ad might promote the Spider-Man line, rather than just a single issue.

We'll increasingly see intra-category crossovers and storylines, as opposed to inter-category events, as the Editor-in-Chief position no longer exists. Categories will increasingly seem like separate companies, which should help to keep lower-end Marvel books from getting lost in the shuffle.

Some insiders have suggested that the removal of the Editor-in-Chief position may also be an attempt to centralize authority, so as to give business management at Marvel more direct control over editorial management. Or, perhaps the goal really is more autonomy — a bottom-up shake-up to revitalize Marvel's sagging sense of creativity.

Wouldn't it be great if this shake-up meant that Marvel was abandoning its conservative creator compensation policy, that editors could now offer hot artists big money? A top artist on a slow, under-ordered Marvel book could revitalize Marvel and the industry for that matter. Todd McFarlane and other Image creators left Marvel to teach them a lesson. Yet the lesson still hasn't been learned.

A few Marvel books on the top ten lists could bring heat and readers to the entire line. Hey Marvel, if you're listening, here's our vote: Quesada on **War Machine**, Sears on **X-Force**, and a young, hot unknown on **Spider-Man** ... not just the covers, the books! And bring them on unannounced, stagger their first books to hit a few months apart, all with low cover prices, and the best writers you can find! Guess what'll happen. KA-BOOM, that's what.

Ah well, it's probably just a **Vantage** dream. Whatever the case, the new Executive Editors are: Bob Harras on X-Men, Bob Budiansky on Spider-Man, and Mark Gruenwald, Carl Potts and Bobbie Chase will divide Marvel Universe and General Entertainment between them. The Executive Editors will report directly to Marvel COO Terry Stewart. Also reporting to Stewart but not necessarily part of this new "team approach" will be newly-formed Malibu Comics and Welsh Publishing.

MAGIC DULLDOZES COMICS INDUSTRY

The hottest thing in comics hasn't made any of the top ten lists, and it hasn't gone up in the price guides. That's because the hottest thing in the comic book industry is not a comic book. It's the fantasy card game from Wizards of the Coast, **Magic: The Gathering.**

From out of nowhere, this company that was run out of the president's basement until August of 1993 has plowed its way through the industry like a bulldozer. **Magic: The Gathering** is an unstoppable, unbelievable, unparalleled retail sales juggernaut.

Check this out. Gaming grand-daddy TSR typically holds a 20 to 30 percent share of the gaming market, with competitors hoping to occasionally break into double-digits. However, according to Capital City Distribution, Wizards of the Coast captured seventy percent of the gaming market in October! They were the #4 overall supplier to comics shops, after Marvel, DC and Image. Wow!

"Magic is the best thing to hit the gaming industry since the introduction of **Dungeons and Dragons**," said Steve Stark of L&S Comix in Merrick, New York. "It's a good part of my business. Ninety-nine percent of my customers are into comics. Twenty percent are buying both," Stark added. "It's bigger than D&D was in the '70s," said Jay O'Neal, owner of the D&D Dragons comic shop.

The spark that led to today's **Magic**-al explosion can be traced back to just three years ago, when Wizards president Peter Adkinson heard about Richard Garfield on the internet. Meeting at a pizza place, Richard pitched his idea for Robo Rally (a game that's now out) to Adkinson.

It was there that Peter issued what Wizards' staffers now call "The Challenge." Adkinson challenged Garfield to create a game that's portable, appealing to the gamer, that can be played in fifteen minutes. One week later, Garfield returned with the concept for **Magic: The Gathering,** and three months later the prototype for **Magic: The Gathering** was finished.

Even at the beginning, "Demand was much larger than originally anticipated," said company spokesperson Rene Shallis. Indeed, ten million cards intended for the first six months were sold in six weeks.

In August of 1993, the game was released from Adkinson's basement office, where just seven people were employed, along with a few volunteers.

Adkinson had started the company out of his apartment only a year before. Today, Wizards of the Coast has 120 employees, over twenty thousand square feet of office space and two international offices.

The Magic customer service line receives about three hundred calls each day, from people with questions related to everything from customer service and products to rules and rumors about the company. (A company favorite is, What's the best/most valuable card? Answer: Land, because you can't do anything without it.)

From the dealers' perspective, the brilliance of **Magic: The Gathering** is that the more you play, the more you buy. Players bring their own sets of cards to each game, and they may bring any cards they wish. The more powerful cards are more expensive on the open market, and packs from each new expansion set sell out quickly. The fifth expansion, titled **Fallen Empires**, should be out by the time you read this.

What's next for Wizards of the Coast? Look for a role-playing game based on **Magic: The Gathering,** due out in one to two years, and look for more **Magic** paraphernalia, like books, pins, and so on. Look for Wizards to continue to push their non-**Magic** products, in an attempt to avoid reliance on one product. And look for **Magic** to stay at the crest of the wave, at least for the near future.

VALIANT TO BRING ON BIG NAMES, MAKE "RADICAL" CHANGES!

Valiant plans to "radically restructure how we do business," and bring on new "name" artists, said Jon Hartz, Vice President of Voyager Communications.

In a candid conversation with **Vantage**, Hartz previewed the announcement that Valiant is to make in a few weeks regarding major changes at the company. Hartz said that as of March, parent company Voyager would "radically restructure what Valiant does." Although Hartz couldn't go into the details, he did say that part of the "radical" changes would include the addition of new big-name talent.

The new "name" creators would begin working for Valiant in or around March of 1994. Valiant has previously marketed its universe on the basis of its attractively tight continuity, without hiring a great deal of big name talent.

The irony here is that the exacting continuity that built Valiant up a few years ago is a liability in today's marketplace. Intense competition for fewer readers has forced publishers to make individual titles stand alone, so as to make them accessible to readers with limited cash. Readers today prefer to buy the best of each universe, not the best universe.

A couple of gorgeous covers from top pros certainly couldn't hurt. Indeed, **Vantage** has learned from inside sources that some Image artists have been approached by Valiant in recent months.

"We're very concerned about what's going on in the marketplace," Hartz said, alluding to the fact that sales have dropped for most comic publishers. Voyager's new owner, Acclaim, must of course be wondering how low the numbers will go. Hartz insisted, however, that Acclaim has "given us the time to be able to institute some of these things."

Hartz also implied there might be a reduction in Valiant output. "I'd like to cause less confusion," he said, adding that there is a "tremendous amount of titles and characters" out there today.

Valiant will also be bringing on creator-owned comics, beginning with two Mike Grell comics (see box). As of February 1995, most catalogs like **Previews** and **Advance Comics** will begin to list Valiant as an imprint of Voyager Communications, along with the Windjammer imprint. Although Valiant plans to offer other creator-owned titles, Windjammer will be used exclusively for Mike Grell titles. In a break from traditional creator-owned marketing, Valiant will give each creator or group of creators a different imprint. **Vantage** applauds this move as additional segmentation — a more sophisticated brand of comic book marketing.

The bottom line, said Hartz, is that as of March, the company is "radically taking a look at what we're doing and how we do business."

Starslayer ©1994 Mike Grell. Voyager Communications, Inc. and Windjammer Publishing Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Voyager To Publish Grell Creator-Owned

Voyager Communications, publisher of the Valiant imprint, will publish its first creator-owned comics in February: two titles from Mike Grell.

The Windjammer imprint will be devoted to Mike Grell projects, launching in February with three comic books: **Bar Sinister** #1 and **Starslayer: The Director's Cut** #1-2.

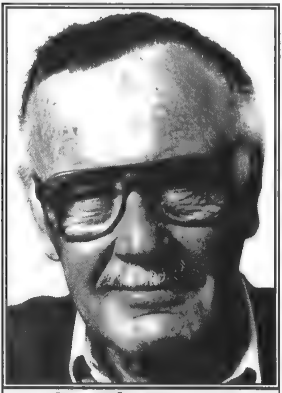
In an unusual move, the Bar Sinister ongoing series will spin off from a comic published by another publisher — **Shaman's Tears** #4 at Image! With the origin of Bar Sinister having taken place in **Shaman's Tears** #4, the military now attempts to capture Bar Sinister before they can breed.

Starslayer: The Director's Cut #1-2 will be the first of eight souped-up reprints of **Starslayer** #1-8. The twelve-year-old art pages from **Starslayer** #1-8 are being refurbished by Grell to the point where one might consider them all-new story and art. Grell fans may consider these books remakes rather than reprints. These old Grell classics are some of his best work, and **Vantage** highly recommends them for reading. Starslayer is essentially Warlord in space, escaping Earth only to be seemingly killed in battle in the first two issues.

VANTAGE QUICKIES

Stan Lee To Run Excelsior Imprint

Stan Lee will soon start and manage a new imprint for Marvel called "Excelsior." The new imprint will debut in the second half of 1995 with two to four titles, said Marvel sources. It is to be run out of Malibu's California offices. Marvel plans to pursue "slow limited growth," to a maximum of six to eight titles.



Stan "The Man" Lee

Marvel To Buy Welsh Publishing

Marvel has agreed to acquire Welsh Publishing, publishers of various comics and comic-related magazines, the company announced. Welsh is well known for publishing child and teen publications like Simpsons-related comic books (as in Homer, not O.J.).

Marvel will acquire the 51% stake in Welsh Publishing held by Donald Welsh, the founder and president, according to the **Wall Street Journal.** Marvel will also buy the 49% stake held by Cypress Capital Partners, the **Journal** said.

Welsh will be retained by Marvel as an Executive Vice President, a position that will allow him to oversee production of the Welsh line and similar Marvel Publications, including **Spider-Man Magazine** and **NFL Pro Action.**

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine #0

This $2.95, forty-page book will be fully painted, detailing the genesis of the Deep Space Nine station. Dr. Bashir and Jadzia Dax learn about the origin of the station and investigate. Look for an illustration of the Defiant (the military ship now docked at the station — hope their Defiant has better luck than ours did), and a special text piece on the **Dominion.**

Deep Space Nine is hot, it's getting hotter, and if there's not a string of movies someday, we'll eat our shorts. This #0 sounds like a fun read and a great collectible.

Spider-Man: A Parker Is To Die

Somebody named Parker will die in **Amazing Spider-Man** #400, the culmination of the big clone storyline, according to Marvel Comics.

Here's what Marvel has to say about it: "... which Parker dies? — Mary Jane, Aunt May — or Peter? ... Here's a hint: in the aftermath of the shocking death, Kaine closes in on the surviving members of the Spiderverse, and only one Wall-Crawler stands in his way, and that's more responsibility than Ben Reilly's ready for!" Also, for **Spider-Man** #57, which hits after #400, Marvel says, "... now there's only one Wall Crawler who can deal with the threat!"

The implication here is that Peter could be the Parker to die. However, keep in mind that this is the same Marvel that told us either Doc Ock or Spidey would die, and that we would not believe which. The tease implied Spider-Man, but we now know the guy who buys it is ol' Doc Ock.

Spider-Man TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

Amazing Spider-Man #400 should be a great read, featuring *somebody's* death and part one of a three-part story of the lost years of the clone (an explanation we'd *really* like to see). This puppy's got a $3.95 price tag on it, so dig deep into your pockets and enjoy.

Neil Gaiman Book Due Out

Just arrived from a run-down alien world, the arch-villain Teknophage shows up in issue #1 of **Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero — The Newmatic Man** to kidnap humans for indentured labor in his dimension.

The Teknophage sounds downright mean and nasty, having grown up (over millions of years) in a depressed factory-ruled world. It doesn't help that he has had to eat other predators all his life. Of course, with each meal, his life-span gets longer, so it can't be all bad.

Rick Veitch will write **Teknophage,** and Bryan Talbot will do the penciling.

Leonard Nimoy Book Due Out

By the time you read this, it will already be released: Leonard Nimoy's Primortals involves some respected names. The comic is scripted by Kate Worley (Omaha the Cat Dancer), penciled by Scot Eaton (Doctor Fate, Swamp Thing), and inked by Mike Barreiro (Hellblazer and Tales of the Jedi).

Maybe There's Some Left (Maybe Not)

Seven companies banded together to produce one million free comic books given out at K-Marts around the nation last month. CBS, Playmates Toys, K-Mart, Landmark Entertainment, Mirage Studios, Nelvana Ltd, and WildStorm Productions gave away **CBS Action Zone** #1 featuring Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, WildC.A.T.s, and the Skeleton Warriors (a Saturday morning show from Landmark).

The companies, all directly or indirectly involved with Skeleton Warriors, WildC.A.T.S., and the Turtles, produced the free comic book with a Jim Lee cover, distributed at K-Marts all over the nation.

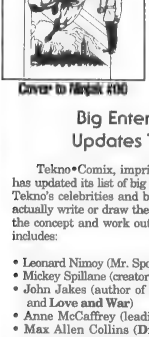
What's the impetus for this unusual crossover? The characters are all Saturday morning CBS cartoons, and CBS apparently decided to recognize the importance of comic book tie-ins. The books were released at the end of October, just in time to catch the attention of kids on Halloween shopping trips.

Since the top-selling comic book in the nation generally sells only a few hundred thousand each month, one million free books is a significant quantity. So maybe there's some left. With the knock-out cover, maybe not. This can only help WildStorm's **WildC.A.T.s** comics and the companion television show.

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

Ninjak #0 and #00! Yes, We Said #00!

Cover to Ninjak #0



Cover to Ninjak #00

You knew it was coming. The double-zero issue! Number zero is part one and a double-zero completes the tale. Here is the story of Ninjak's origin, created over a six-week trip to London and Tokyo. Writer/artist Mark Moretti actually traveled to London and Tokyo, snapping pictures and drawing sketches as research for the story. A Valiant statement insists, "This may be one of the most well-researched comics ever produced."

Spanning 30 years, this two-part origin special will clue us in on Ninjak's past as Colin King, and how he became a master spy, computer expert, playboy and martial arts master. We'll also learn about Ninjak's long lost heartache, and we'll examine his insatiable death wish.

Recommended reading and due out soon. The double-zero makes us groan, but it just might work.

Big Entertainment Updates Talent List

Tekno•Comix, imprint of Big Entertainment, has updated its list of big names on board. Although Tekno's celebrities and best-selling authors don't actually write or draw the books, they do develop the concept and work out a plot. The list now includes:

- Leonard Nimoy (Mr. Spock from **Star Trek**)
- Mickey Spillane (creator of **Mike Hammer**)
- John Jakes (author of **North and South** and **Love and War**)
- Anne McCaffrey (leading fantasy writer)
- Max Allen Collins (**Dick Tracy** writer)
- Neil Gaiman (**Sandman** writer)

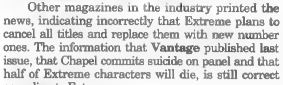
Big Entertainment is the publicly-held company co-founded by Mitchell Rubenstein and Laurie Silvers, media-lawyers who co-founded the Sci-Fi Channel and then sold it to the USA Network.

Big Entertainment Makes Multi-Media Alliances

Big Entertainment, publisher of the comic Tekno•Comix imprint, has entered into multi-media arrangements with various companies. FutureVision of America will test an electronic comic strip on Bell Atlantic's fiber optic network. RCI long distance will create and market an interactive prepaid phone card offering Tekno news and trivia. Big has retained New York's Park Avenue firm Bear, Stearns & Co. to advise on issues such as strategic alliances and other business opportunities.

Extreme News Is Not Correct

Published reports in magazines other than **Vantage** indicating that Extreme is canceling all or almost all titles are not correct. "We almost printed the news too, but caught it at the printer just in time when Extreme announced they had changed their plans," said **Vantage** Publisher Rob Golub.



Other magazines in the industry printed the news, indicating incorrectly that Extreme plans to cancel all titles and replace them with new number ones. The information that **Vantage** published last issue, that Chapel commits suicide on panel and that half of Extreme characters will die, is still correct according to Extreme.

Shi Artist/Creator Bill Tucci

Shi Changes Plans

Artist/Creator William Tucci's original plans to produce a **Shi** mini-series, followed by a period of absence from the industry, have been scrapped. Tucci instead plans to continue with his bi-monthly **Shi** series. **Shi** is the comic that **Vantage** spotlighted on the cover of our first issue, only to watch it take the nation by storm when it came out months later.

"I'm going to just keep plugging away at this. I think the story's really good," Tucci told **Vantage.** "The storyline is

VANTAGE QUICKIES (continued)

changing a lot. The character is taking over the book."

Other then that, Tucci is trading illustrations with Marc Silvestri for publication. Plus, Tucci plans on introducing a new "bad-girl" female character in **Shi** #5. **Vantage** will keep you posted.

Will the "bad girl" syndrome still be around in a year?

"I don't know, I don't know about that. I think some books are going to be around. I think we'll be around," said Tucci.

Caliber Press Announces New Logo

Caliber Press will unveil a new logo design in February (see right) that will unify the appearance of the entire line, the company told **Vantage.** This logo will be used on all Caliber titles except for the pre-established mini-series that have already defined their appearance. Within a six-month transition period all Caliber titles will showcase the new logo design.

"We will still try to allow the creators to have as much freedom as possible when designing the appearance of their particular title, but we feel that this actually helps serve as a valuable selling vehicle," said a company statement. Caliber offers one of the most diverse lines in the marketplace.

Prophet #1 To Get Dixon

Chuck Dixon, a notable comic book writer, will join Platt on **Prophet** #1 and beyond. This books fits the old **Vantage** formula, that great art plus great writing, under the right conditions, can lead to back-issue excitement. Keep an eye on **Prophet.**

Game Cards At The Movies

General Cinema outlets all over the nation are giving out free Tekno game pieces to their customers, as you read this. The game pieces will be available only at participating General Cinema theaters and they'll feature cool Tekno*Comix artwork.

Wolverine TM & © 1994 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Yup, Wolverine #90 Is Big

Last issue: "We don't know for sure if [Wolverine and Sabretooth will] fight to the death." This issue: **Wolverine** #90 will feature a major event on its last page, and the issue in general is to feature a final confrontation. Although we still have no confirmation, it would seem that either Wolverine or Sabretooth will die in this issue. While the return of time to normal could make this book no more that a What If?, it will be part of Wolverine continuity and regular issue numbering. Pretty cool, eh?

Yup, X-Men #41 Is Big Too

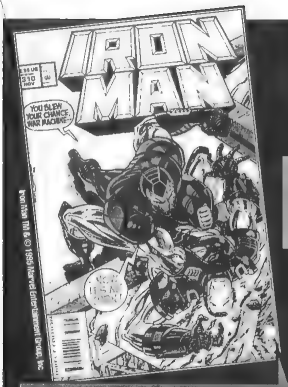
Last issue: "**X-Men** #41 may be the book where the good Professor dies! However, we must emphasize that this in unconfirmed as we go to press."

This issue: **X-Men** #41 will definitely feature the death of Professor X, though no official announcement has been made, according to Diamond Comics Distributors. We may see some order increases from retailers who learn of this from **Vantage,** their distributors, or other sources. However, **Vantage** does not expect the increases on #41 to bring it to the level it should have been originally ordered at.

Though a Top Pick last month too, **Vantage** reemphasizes the book this month by making it a Top Pick once more.

Mantra Gets Pregnant

Mantra, who is a man trapped in a woman's body, will be featured pregnant on the cover of **Mantra** #18. Mantra hates her life in a woman's body, and the cover is to feature a very pregnant-looking picture of her. Malibu says we "won't forget this issue's incredible last page!" Pretty cool stuff, eh?



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Magic: The Gathering™

Scavenger Hunt!

Send In Six Cards And Get A Signed Card Free!

This has got to be our coolest promotion ever! Just send us six Magic: The Gathering Cards, and we'll send you a signed one for free! With the tremendous heat behind Magic: The Gathering right now, we'd normally charge about a billion bucks for a signed card! Vantage now brings you the opportunity to pick up a signed piece of the hot game of the '90s, for FREE!

The rules are simple. We'll take ANY of the following *Magic: The Gathering* cards:

Desert Twister
Wyluli Wolf
Glyph of Doom
Blazing Effigy
Transmutation
Mijoc Djinn
Glyph of Life
Equinox
Psychic Purge

and from the Fallen Empires set:

Combat Medic
Elven Huntress
Vodalian Knights
Vodalian Soldiers
Vodalian Wizard

The above list of cards, drawn by Susan Van Camp, are the only cards we will accept. Cards not listed are unacceptable, even if Susan drew them. The cards must be mint and multiples are okay. You must send us six to get back a FREE card signed by Susan! We must receive the cards by January 30, 1995. We cannot honor requests for a specific signed card — it's the luck of the draw!

__ Yes, I have traded, purchased, and scavenged for cards from the above list and I've found some! Six cards are enclosed. I have packed my six cards carefully to ensure mint condition. Also enclosed is a check or money order for $2.50 to pay for the shipping and handling of my FREE Magic: The Gathering card, signed by artist Susan Van Camp and accompanied by a Vantage certificate of authenticity.

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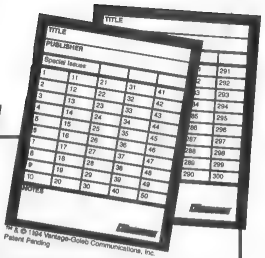

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AT LONG LAST, SPAWN CARDS

What do all of these have in common: WildC.A.T.s, Youngblood, Shadowhawk, and Savage Dragon? Besides less-than-successful card sets, they are all characters from the Image creators. Now stir in CyberForce and (most importantly) Spawn, add a dash of Topps finest flash, and you have the makings of a killer card set.

Topps Finest series cards exploded on the sports scene, a success story born to Scarcity and Quality. Their first non-sports set will feature ninety chromium cards, and two sets of chase cards (six "Clearzone Chrome," whatever that turns out to be, and twelve cards which feature the creators and their characters meeting).

VANTAGE Card Picks

Topps Finest Image Universe: Founders Series

Best of Boris All-Chromium

Image is hot right now, and this set, coming on the heels of the WildStorm and WildC.A.T.s cards and featuring high-quality art, should generate instant demand. In particular, there is an enormous market for Spawn cards, and this is the first time that some have been available in a regular card set.

Vantage also wants to send out a word of warning — the Topps Finest sports cards have all been severely allocated, and if that happens with these cards the price per box could increase rapidly.

"You have the makings of a killer card set"

"Expect demand to again outstrip supply, making these cards a quick sell-out"

COMIC IMAGES GREATEST HITS, VOLUME TWO

Two of the most popular series of cards have featured the artwork of Olivia and Boris. In October, Comic Images released the Best of Olivia All-Chromium cards, and they are following up that success with the Best of Boris All-Chromium cards. Like the Olivia cards, these cards feature some partial nudity, but the subject matter includes the ever-popular barbarians in battle rather than just the pin-up type of art that the Olivia cards have, giving the Boris set a potentially larger audience. The normal CI chase cards are present again: six "OmniChrome" chase cards, a three-card subset, a limited edition medallion card, and 500 autographed cards. **Vantage** expects demand to again outstrip supply, making these cards a quick sell-out with good long-term potential.

Olivia is not being completely overlooked, either. This month she has another keepsake edition available, the Olivia/Daydreams keepsake collection. This limited edition collector's set consists of six frame-size cards plus a mini-press sheet with normal-sized copies of the cards.

FROM BIGGER TO BIGGEST

Fleer is once again offering frame-size cards (cards that are about 6.5" by 10"), this time featuring art from the Ultra X-Men 1995 card set. As mentioned last month, several of these cards will be included in the binder that came out with the regular-sized cards, so there may be more demand for these cards than there was for the last few Fleer sets. Dealers can order sets of cards and break them down to sell single cards. As in the past, **Vantage** will keep an eye out for Wolverine and Gambit cards which are available for the same price as the other cards, expecting these cards to command higher prices later.

Dynamic Forces has been heavily involved in production of autographed comics, and they've decided to go the frame-size cards one better with (trumpet fanfare!) Hellshock: World's Largest Card. This card is about two feet by three feet, features Hellshock artwork on both sides, and is autographed by Jae Lee and shipped in a mylar sleeve. While **Vantage** isn't sure how to hang this card to display both sides (a hole in the wall between the living room and a bedroom?), only

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2500 people will be able to buy the card and figure out what to do with it.

SHOW ME A CHASE CARD

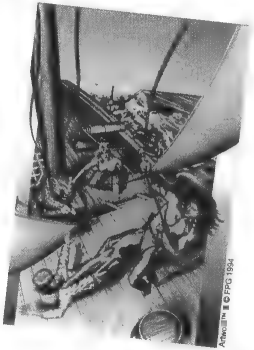
Star Trek card collectors have yet another set to look forward to this month, the Star Trek: The Next Generation Episodes Series Two cards. While any Star Trek card set has a built-in audience, the chase cards in the recent Star Trek Master Series Two cards were so disappointing that the boxes were nearly dead on arrival — the chase cards looked just like normal cards except for a small foil strip on the back (three of the nine had a foil signature on the front, but it didn't help much). The solicitation for these cards was chilling to any dealer who is still sitting on these cards: two nine-card "foil-stamped" subsets. Before even picking up a box of these cards you should probably get a look at the chase cards. If they look nice, you might want a few extra boxes, otherwise you can probably pick them up very, very cheaply a few weeks after they first appear.

MOVING THE ART GALLERY UPTOWN

FPG has fought hard to establish their art cards and claw out a niche for themselves, and this month they are taking a step that should help: beginning with the Jeff Easley Fantasy Art Cards they will be using 18-point card stock. This thicker, more substantial card should help support their higher-priced cards, although there is almost no change in the cost to consumers (at most about two or three dollars per box). Easley's artwork is instantly recognizable to gamers everywhere since it includes countless covers for TSR's AD&D™ books and Dragon magazine. This is art similar to the successful Larry Elmore set from earlier in the year, and the more solid feel of the cards should help garner more attention.

The second set of cards offered by FPG this month is also on the heavier card stock, the Barclay Shaw Fantasy Art Cards. The title may be a little misleading, since many of Shaw's pictures are more accurately science fiction, but the mood created by his illustrations is clearly rooted in fantasy. Track down one of the promo cards released for this set, and you'll no doubt love the cards as much as **Vantage** does.

90 regular cards, five metallic storm chase cards, and very limited autographed cards (1000 for each artist) are featured in foil boxes for each



set, and collectors can look forward to new pieces of art as well.

SPECULATIVE CORNER

Do you know what a Skeleton Warrior is? Apparently kids who watch Saturday morning cartoons do, since CBS has a television show by that name. You would expect that a card set based on lots and lots of skeletons (those are the bad guys) would come out near Halloween, but Fleer decided to release them in January. The folks at Fleer have plenty of practice producing cards for the younger market thanks to a year of Marvel cards, and the setup looks just like another Marvel release: a 100-card set, 9 Power Blast chase cards, and 10 Suspended Animation chase cards. One new wrinkle (which should be the hit portion of the set): five "Luma Bone" cards that glow in the dark.

Will these cards be a hit? Sadly, it depends as much on the cartoon show as anything else — hence the gamble. Kids' tastes are fickle, and the show could go out of favor quickly. **Vantage** is also concerned that the age of the audience may be a little young to support cards that cost $1.75 a pack, and it seems clear that almost nobody will be buying boxes of the cards (this is after Christmas, and those kids just got through promising everything for a box of the X-Men cards). Still, the cards will be attractive, and low orders by most

Hal Foster's Prince Valiant is a registered trademark

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hobby stores might mean that those who have the cards can sell them readily.

QUICK NOTES

If you really enjoyed the Power Ranger cards, Collect-A-Card will help you out with the Superhuman Samurai Syber Squad cards. These are based on a syndicated television show that **Vantage** has never even heard of, so proceed at your own risk.

21st Century Archives has a better offer for its Comic Art Tribute to Jack Kirby — for about $10 you can purchase a factory set. This is an impressive price not because it includes the fifty regular cards, but because all five of the DiamondChrome chase cards are included as well.

If you recognize the name of Hal Foster, you no doubt are familiar with Prince Valiant. A large half-page of the Sunday color comics was once devoted to his prose-heavy stories, and Comic Images is now offering both boxes (complete with chase cards) and sets. If you can pass off a few extra sets you'll be much better off picking up a box, but then you'll no doubt find yourself searching for the chase cards you didn't get, a task that may prove difficult (so pick up an extra box or two and keep your fingers crossed).

COMICS ARE FOR READING First!

By Rich Keller

Matt Chaney was framed for a murder he didn't commit and sent to the federal penitentiary. While there, he was experimented on by the military and a race of aliens to create a breed of superhuman troopers. They removed one of his arms and replaced it with an alien one, giving him powers he never had before. However, when they tried to connect him up to a mind control device he escaped. Now Matt is trying to figure out just what happened while running from prison authorities, police, aliens, and his surgically altered wife who has been reprogrammed to kill him. (And you wonder why they say the prison system doesn't work today.) Hence, you have the formula for Black Out Comics' **Outbreed 999,** an ongoing series created and written by Bruce Schoengood. If you liked Aliens and The Fugitive (which we hope all **Vantage** readers do), then you'll love this.

This is definitely not a storyline you'll see on any future episodes of Deep Space Nine. It's dark and gritty science fiction: most of the scenes take place at night or in darkened rooms. The darkness mirrors the emotions of basically everyone involved in the book. The dialogue is straightforward, and there's very little in comedy relief. It's hard to be funny when you're running from the law and struggling to regain a portion of a life you have recently lost.

It's also very action oriented. And when I say action, I mean ACTION! From the moment the reader opens to page one it's nonstop: from the prison escape to the fight on the hi-speed passenger train with his wife to the battle in the blazing apartment building with a battle-suited federal officer.

Because there's so much action, there's very little time for Matt (or any other characters) to stop in mid-story and ponder the meaning of life. Even when he gives a recap of his origins it's summarized in only two or three pages. This is good. I mean, who wants to see a battle to the death be interrupted by a monologue about his love life? It just doesn't work in this book.

Instead, Matt's feelings are described through first person narratives throughout the story that add even more to the action. It's like reading a good novel and having the pictures you create in your mind right in front of you.

Outbreed 999 encourages the reader not to stop at just one book. They ensure the book's continuous readership through a series of plot twists and surprises at the end of each chapter. Chaney's wife becomes the reprogrammed superhuman trooper at the end of the first issue and the reader has to pick up the second book to see what happens. The end of the second issue reveals the extent of damage they did when they gave Matt the alien arm. The reader has to issue three

This is definitely not a storyline you'll see on any future episodes of Deep Space Nine. It's dark and gritty science fiction.

to see what he'll do. When it seems a storyline has been tied-up, a new twist is put on it and there's no choice but to read on.

A good book to me is one that can combine action with a tight storyline. **Outbreed 999** is that book.

"So then, there was only one Green Lantern, and I'm it. Everybody better get used to the idea." With that, Kyle Rayner became the one and only Green Lantern, while Hal Jordan, the former GL, bowed out ungracefully as Oa exploded under him. Of course, an exploding planet in comics means as much as another Roseanne wedding. But for the time being, Hal, is out of the DC Universe, while Kyle has the spotlight. Under the scripting of Ron Marz, a better **Green Lantern** book is born.

Why, you ask, is this a better book? Well, maybe you don't ask, but I'll tell you anyway. The new GL isn't written as a whiner like his predecessor was during the last few years. Every time you turned around it seemed Hal was complaining about something: I want the Earth sector back, I want Coast City back, I want to go to Miami (OK, he didn't say that one, but I wanted to put it in just to make sure all you readers were paying attention). The worst part was Hal actually came to believe that the ring could fix everything that had gone wrong for him.

Fine, he was a hero, but the writers had made him a one-dimensional figure. He was really no longer Hal Jordan: playboy (not the bunny type, although that would have made an interesting plot line) and test pilot... he was Green Lantern, and that's it.

Kyle realizes that while he basically has unlimited power to get anything he wants, like the Sci-Fi Network from his cable company, he also has to eat and make a living.

Marz's Green Lantern is totally the opposite of Hal. Kyle is also a hero with a ring, but he also has a normal life as an artist, interrupted when an Oan gave him the ring. He realizes that while he basically has unlimited power to get anything he wants, like the Sci-Fi Network from his cable company, he also has to eat and make a living.

Having a multifaceted personality, Kyle is able to use the ring in a more imaginative manner. Instead of conjuring up a fist to pummel someone, he creates an anvil around his hand. Instead of encasing himself in emerald armor, he creates a 'Robotech'-style exo-suit for himself. He has a vivid imagination, and what better way than the ring to put those visions to productive use?

Unlike his predecessor, Kyle also realizes something important about his role as the last Green Lantern: It's a responsibility not to take lightly or to be used for one's personal gain. For example, early on in Kyle's run in the series his girlfriend gets killed. Hal confronts him with this fact during their final battle on Oa and says Kyle can bring her back with the ring, just like Hal wanted to bring back Coast City. While Kyle still loves her, he also realizes that it wouldn't be right. For Hal, it's 'Life's not fair.' For Kyle, it's 'Who ever said it was?' In the end, Ron Marz has created a more realistic hero: One who can say 'Life's a b——', shrug it off to an extent, and move along.

As Kyle says at the end of **Green Lantern** #0, "I'm not Hal Jordan, Hal's gone... the job belongs to me now." The book is no longer about a man with a ring, it's about a man who has a responsibility for a power, as well as a reputation to uphold. This isn't your father's **Green Lantern** anymore... it's better.

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I SOLD MALIBU TO MARVEL!

In 1986 Scott Rosenberg started Malibu from scratch. Today, comics' biggest company has agreed to purchase Malibu for an undisclosed amount. Rosenberg remains at the top, running Malibu as an Executive Vice President of Marvel, reporting directly to Marvel Chief Operating Officer Terry Stewart. Just days after the signing of the deal, **Vantage** and Rosenberg kicked back and shot the breeze. Read about the big buy and what it means to comics, plus a rare and candid perspective on the back-issue market!

"I hope everything works out that we all play together nicely."

From left to right: Scott Rosenberg and Terry Stewart

VANTAGE: *The big question on people's minds this afternoon is why. Why did Marvel buy Malibu and why did Malibu sell?*

ROSENBERG: As you probably know we were courted by five companies [Malibu won't disclose the names - Editor]. We had a lot of decision-making to do. We evaluated all the potential candidates. Marvel was the best one for several reasons.

The people at Marvel are just wonderful and are very similar to the people here. With characters being able to meet each other for the first time — its all the fun stuff. We got increased worldwide recognition. We can tap into their international sales network, and actually self-publish in Mexico, Italy, and Germany.

So worldwide, we're going to have a much stronger base of sales than we've had on our own. As you know we were very successful in the Ultraverse launch. Probably of any of the new universe launches we were the most successful in the last five years.

But that doesn't get us worldwide. That helps here in the US. But worldwide now we have more strength in making TV and movie deals. Which will also make us stronger here. In fact we're very close to announcing our first animated deal. [Rosenberg wouldn't comment further on this, but other sources tell Vantage that he means Ultraforce, hence our picks for this month.] We're looking at Fall '95 for that.

We have also increased our action figure line

Riptide™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc

Godwheel cover art™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc

from seven to twelve. So when your next question is are you staying with Galoob or going with Toy Biz, we're allowed to act very autonomously and in fact we're increasing our line with Galoob.

So when you ask "Why Marvel?", we looked at everyone. We now have expanded distribution everywhere. We have more deal-making abilities. We have the ability to further expand our characters into the entertainment realm. We remain autonomous. We have all of the expanded resources of Marvel and all of the sister companies.

VANTAGE: *Why do you think Marvel chose to go with Malibu?*

ROSENBERG: Terry said, and he told us we could use this quote, he could say why he went for Malibu in one line: the Ultraverse and the Malibu people. Beyond that, he's very interested in our coloring and production processes. We expand the demographics for Marvel by several years. He loves how we can push the envelope where Marvel can't, because of the decades of history, they just can't on some things. It allows an alternative voice for Marvel than what they have. It also gives them a west coast base. So there's a lot of good things in it.

VANTAGE: *Since Marvel already publishes creator-owned titles under Epic, would you say that there's some repetitiveness here?*

ROSENBERG: They see Bravura as what Epic was supposed to be. If you take a look at their line

there isn't much Epic left in it. Terry says Bravura is what Epic was always meant to be. So it's not really duplicating anything over there, it's the right line.

VANTAGE: *Given that most of Malibu's major competitors were owned by larger companies, would you say that Malibu was forced to sell in order to compete in a tough market?*

ROSENBERG: Forced isn't a good word because we had five companies courting us. We really decided that we wanted a huge parent and someone whose resources we could tap into, so it wasn't really a force, it was the next logical step. We launched the Ultraverse, we had it out there, and now we wanted to go worldwide. We weren't ready to send it worldwide in the first year, because we were still working things through, and had to prove that people liked it. So it really is the right time for us.

VANTAGE: *As Marvel's largest competitor, how do you think DC's going to react to this? Do you think Marvel is putting them on the defensive?*

ROSENBERG: Well, we're actually hopeful that our crossover is still going to go over with DC. We have very strong relations with them. I believe there's going to be a lot of other crossovers, hopefully between Marvel and DC. I hope everything works out that we all play together nicely. I have a great love for DC Comics. Well, it is going to be interesting because it does change the marketplace somewhat.

VANTAGE: *How do you think it changes the marketplace?*

ROSENBERG: Well, you have a company the size of Marvel now saying that we want a whole company that pushes the envelope, that's very aggressive, that does marketing like no one has ever seen in the comic book industry before, whose strength is creating characters. They're willing to give us more resources to do even more of that. I think that fans are in a position where they don't know what to expect because of the new Malibu/Marvel merger, and it's going to allow for some excitement. They're two very different lines. Obviously there's some reasons for this that we're not discussing yet.

VANTAGE: *I was just going to say, do you have any crossovers in mind?*

ROSENBERG: We're not discussing it yet. We need to leave some things for surprise.
[sigh... Vantage is always asking questions that people can't discuss. —Editor]

VANTAGE: *The purchase seems to be part of a growing trend of contraction in the industry. Diamond purchased Overstreet, Acclaim bought Valiant, and so on. Why do you think this is happening? Will we see more of this in the future?*

ROSENBERG: I don't know that I would necessarily call it a contraction. Diamond isn't a publishing company, it's a distribution company. They're expanding the types of things that they do. Acclaim is a video game company, so it's not really a contraction where they're purchasing Valiant.

I think what's happening is, a lot of companies both inside and outside the comic book industry, are seeing a value in hitting different segments of the market. So I don't necessarily see this as a contraction. What I've always seen in the comic industry, is that for each comic that goes away, another comes to fill its shoes.

What seems to be happening now, because

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there's just so many, is regardless of what the fans may like and want, it comes down to whether retailers feel the line will have longevity. If they feel there's longevity, they're going to stock the shelves with it. That's something that we see as creating a major upswing for orders in the future. Because retailers — although we've been saying all along that Ultraverse is forever — some of them have said okay, yeah, it is, I love it, and others say I'm gonna wait another year or two and I don't have rack space anyway.

Now they're going to take a look at Ultraverse and they're going to say well, I guess it's going to be here for another fifty years. It's time to start finding all the pre-Marvel Ultraverse titles and put them in one special section and start carrying the ongoing Ultraverse series because they're obviously here forever. I think that's going to be a big change for us.

VANTAGE: *What kind of economic future do you see for the industry in general?*

ROSENBERG: I think that it's going to be tough at least until next summer. The market's kind of funny. What everyone forgets is that when we had the original time in the early eighties when you didn't have 400 titles a month, you had 150, 200 titles a month. There was the boom in '86, where everyone went out and started publishing extra comics, leading to 400 a month.

Retailers ordered them like crazy because everything was selling. But, retailers forgot they didn't have rack space for 400 comics. So when they all hit the store shelves, they couldn't rack everything, and sales started plummeting. There was the bust of '87.

Godwheel Cover art ™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

"It's the old investor thing and the old collector thing... once something is canceled, if it doesn't come back as a miniseries or something, everyone loses interest and the book loses value."

Then '88, '89, '90 was a slow increase again, with '92-'93 being the huge boom, and we went from 400 titles a month to 700 or 750. Again, retailers really didn't have the rack space. They finally had the rack space for four hundred, now we're at seven to seven fifty. So what happened is they started putting the comics on the rack for a week instead of a month or two months, and it hurt everyone's sell-through, which caused retailers financial problems.

Comics were thrown in quarter bins. Fans and speculators lost interest. They could buy a comic for cover price one day and half-cover or less the next day. Well, with this current bust the same thing really happened again.

The market's going back again to where there's 600 titles or 550 titles a month. It slowly is going to roll back to what retailers can have in stock. They'll probably increase the amount that they can carry from before, but they're not going to go to 600 or 700. They'll probably go to 450 or something.

And as that works its way through all the distribution channels over the next six months or so, and as the readers and the fans start finding that if they want something they're going to need to buy it when it comes out because there's no more quarter or fifty cent bins unless they have 1993 comics in them, the market's going to start turning around again like it's done before and I think there's going to be many years of expansion.

And, not to say we're not going to all make the same mistake again in six or seven years. We probably will. But I think we're looking towards a nice healthy expansion that's probably going to

start in the middle of next year. And I think what's going to happen, in my mind at least, with our particular titles, is people are going to go back and say gee, these pre-Marvel Ultraverse titles are kind of hard to get. Fan interest in general is going to start picking up on ours.

And that may happen with any line that people believe is going to stick around for a long time. It's the old investor thing and the old collector thing... once something is canceled, if it doesn't come back as a miniseries or something, everyone loses interest and the book loses value. At least in all the lines that people believe are going to be around forever, I think there's going to be renewed interest, and we're going to get fans starting to be excited again about things happening.

VANTAGE: *How much cross-pollenation is there going to be between Marvel and Malibu? Will you really be run as separate entities?*

ROSENBERG: We're definitely separate and autonomous entities. Everything from making TV and film deals that I do, to my editors making their own decisions. There's no reporting back and forth between our staff and Marvel's staff. I'm a senior executive vice-president for Marvel which puts me right under Terry, which puts me right in the loop for everything that's happening on the Marvel side. So it's really a good relationship.

VANTAGE: *How does it feel, having started this company from humble beginnings in 1986, selling the company to Marvel, and housing the current operations of living legend Stan Lee?*

ROSENBERG: Ecstatic would be the main word that I could use. I've been a comic book fan forever. To have this strong a place in the industry, to be involved with both Marvel and Malibu, is very personally satisfying. I love it. I'm a long time fan. This is like having my cake and eating it too. I used to be like a kid in a candy store, now I'm like a kid in a candy warehouse. I just love it. Our staff around the office is elated about it. Just about everyone we've talked to thinks this is a major positive net plus-plus for everyone involved.

WHAT THE HECK ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

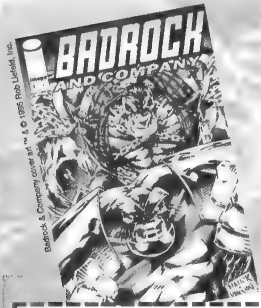
Direct Response Marketing: Selling to people by asking them to respond directly to you, through a coupon, a phone number, etc. Coca-Cola ads on TV are not direct response, but subscription ads in magazines are.

The Direct Market: The packing, counting, and trucking system that serves comic book shops, but not stores like Wal-Mart. The term is also used to describe comic shops in general.

Sell-through: How strong sales on a comic are as compared to how many the store ordered.

Ruins™ & © 1995 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc.

WIN GOLD BLOODSHOT #0 AND SIGNED BADROCK #1!!



You lucky son of a gun! All you need do is fill out the coupon below and you could be randomly selected to win! One lucky stiff will walk away with a copy of **Gold Bloodshot** #0 PLUS, the stiff'll get a copy of **Badrock** #1 signed by penciler Todd Nalick and inker Lary Stucker!

If this fantastic combination doesn't get your blood going, call an ambulance. Remember, tell us below what you're honestly thinking. Your input will help us to make **Vantage** even better for YOU!

YES!!! **I want to win Gold Bloodshot #0 and Badrock #1 signed by Todd Nalick and Lary Stucker!!!**

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE _____ AGE (OPTIONAL) _____

Three back-issue comics I might buy soon:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Three back-issue comics I recently purchased (and their prices):

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

(Optional) Hey, **Vantage,** as long as I'm writing you I'd like to get a trial box of Comic Book Checklist Cards! Enclosed is a check for $12.35 postpaid for 125 Vantage Comic Book Checklist Cards. These cards are trading card sized for easy display in binders, etc.

(Optional) Hey **Vantage,** as long as I'm writing you, here's my quick two cents for Vantage Viewpoints! I want you to know what my dream crossover would be, what I think of this month's news, what I'm having for dinner tonight, or some other pointless drivel:

_____

_____

_____

Vantage B÷B Contest • 13000 W. Blue Mound Road, #110 • Elm Grove, WI 53122

Badrock cover art ™ & © 1995 Voyager Communications, Inc.

From left to right: Illustrations © 1994 Margaret Organ-Kean, Anson Maddocks, Liz Danforth, Sandra Everingham, Susan Van Camp, Melissa Benson, Douglas Shuler

Vantage had a chance to talk with Richard Garfield recently. Richard is the creator of the immensely popular card game **Magic: The Gathering** (MTG), the first Deckmaster game from Wizards of the Coast (WOTC).

VANTAGE: *You've said that you were influenced by* ***Cosmic Encounters*** *when you designed* ***MTG.*** *What other games were important?*

GARFIELD: Lots of them. A game named **King of the Tabletop** that I think appeared in Dragon magazine, and **Strat-O-Matic Baseball.** I never played the baseball game, but I was impressed that each player could put together a team using different cards in a draft. Back in school I invented a card game I called "Master of the Five Magics" that allowed players to tailor their hands.

VANTAGE: *When did the idea of collectible cards first come up?*

GARFIELD: About three summers ago. I came to WOTC with another game, **Robo Rally,** which they felt was too expensive for them to produce.

VANTAGE: *They can certainly afford it now.*

GARFIELD: They have produced it; the first set is already sold out. I tried the collectible card concept on other games first, but **MTG** is the first one where it really clicked. After I went back to WOTC with **MTG,** the whole staff did nothing but play for about a week. We play-tested for about a year and a half, and eventually **MTG** was released.

VANTAGE: *Is there an easiest color for new players to play?*

GARFIELD: I designed the card set to try to force people to use several colors rather than just one. The easiest colors for new players would be green and red. I refer to this combination as the poor man's colors. There are a lot of simple, powerful, common creatures there. Black and white work well with any other colors. After a player has lots of experience, the most powerful color is blue. There are some extremely powerful blue cards, but it is more difficult to play and some of the best cards are rare.

VANTAGE: *Why did you produce a factory set and then limit its use?*

GARFIELD: When we first put out the game, we didn't really expect people to collect the cards; that's why there weren't any numbers on them. A lot of people wanted to see all the art on the cards or collect all the cards, but they didn't want to spend a lot of money when they weren't going to play with the cards. We decided to produce the factory sets so that somebody could buy all the cards at once.

VANTAGE: *So you were worried about protecting the people who had spent a lot of money on the cards?*

GARFIELD: Yes. We decided to give the cards square corners — we were saying, "Okay, here are

all the cards. Don't play with them." Sometimes it's hard to communicate our intentions, but we never planned for people to use the factory sets to play with.

VANTAGE: *Several months ago a number of gaming magazines solicited "exclusive" cards for* ***MTG,*** *but then they were all canceled. What's the status of these cards?*

GARFIELD: There are really two cases: The Duelist, and everybody else.

VANTAGE: *The Duelist is the house magazine for WOTC?*

GARFIELD: Yes. It will feature special cards that may not be available elsewhere. The current issue has a copy of the DragonCon card that was drawn by Michael Whelan glued into it.

VANTAGE: *Can the card be removed and used?*

GARFIELD: I think so, it's a very light glue.

VANTAGE: *So it will be important for completists to pick up The Duelist?*

GARFIELD: Sure. I think the magazine is getting much better, too. Other magazines will have **MTG** cards, but they will be pre-release copies of cards from upcoming sets. People should be able to play with them, and they'll be indistinguishable from the cards that come out later. These will be preview cards rather than limited cards.

VANTAGE: *Why is there such a long lead time between solicitation of the cards and actual delivery? Comics and most non-sports cards show up six to eight weeks after orders from dealers, but* ***MTG*** *seems to need six months or more.*

GARFIELD: We have our cards printed in Belgium...

Illus. TM 1993 Douglas Shuler

VANTAGE: *Nobody in the U.S. can produce cards?*

GARFIELD: The problem is quality — we wanted the best quality cards, and that meant going to Europe. The printer is scheduled for months in advance, and it can take a long time to get enough paper and other materials ordered as well.

VANTAGE: *And in the meantime, the number of players has grown so much that demand far outstrips supply. With* ***The Dark,*** *for example, dealers were charging double the suggested retail price within a few days of the latest release.*

GARFIELD: We're trying to find ways to stop that. With **Ice Ages** we may change the way cards are solicited. Instead of limiting the production to initial orders, we may start limiting production to a limited period, so that the cards are available continuously for six to twelve months.

VANTAGE: *With starter decks and boosters and...*

GARFIELD: And maybe black borders on the initial orders and white borders thereafter. We may also change the distribution of the starter decks to match the booster decks with respect to rare and uncommon cards. We haven't finalized plans yet.

VANTAGE: *The last release for 1994 will be* ***Fallen Empires.*** *Is it going to be as scarce as* ***The Dark?***

GARFIELD: No. We've printed lots of them. A lot more than people think we have, so they should be available to everybody who wants them.

VANTAGE: *Did you like the way the new set came out? I hear it has more of a solid story to it.*

GARFIELD: Yes it does. It was done by the same designers who did **Antiquities,** which I thought was our best expansion set so far — it had a great story line if you read all the cards. I like the story for **Fallen Empires.**

VANTAGE: *Which might lend itself to more of a role-playing feel. Will there be another revised set next year?*

GARFIELD: We plan to revise the cards again. We will add a few cards and remove some others that are too powerful. We will also change some of the less important cards to make them more useful.

A lot of people concentrate only on the cards we've removed, but I think its important to look at the cards we change to give the game better balance.

Illus. © 1994 Mark Tedin

VANTAGE: *Why has it become so difficult for dealers to get starter decks and boxes of booster packs?*

GARFIELD: We had two weeks of production that came back too dark this Fall. We decided that the cards were not up to the standards we've set for ourselves (they were too dark), so we destroyed them. We lost a lot of cards.

VANTAGE: *Can't you simply get another printing done?*

GARFIELD: The problem is scheduling. The printer is booked for months.

VANTAGE: *So there won't be any more starters and boosters until February?*

GARFIELD: I don't think so. There will probably be a drought for awhile. [Note: Since the interview, WOTC has managed to get the printer to reschedule, so there will probably be more boxes of cards available just in time for Christmas.]

VANTAGE: *How has the* ***MTG*** *novel been doing?*

GARFIELD: Better than we expected. Oh, it's not a run-away best-seller, but its sales are respectable so far.

VANTAGE: *Are sales primarily to people who want to send the coupon in for the cards?*

GARFIELD: We don't know; it seems likely. But the book is a good read.

VANTAGE: *Will there be more?*

GARFIELD: Probably.

VANTAGE: *Are there plans for a role-playing game based on* ***MTG****?*

GARFIELD: We have some designers working on one now, but it's very preliminary work. We want to find some way for gamers to play using the cards on the table as reference materials somehow.

VANTAGE: *Tournaments are popular, but new players (or those who haven't spent tons of money on rarer cards) are at a disadvantage. Is there some easy way to handicap tournaments at stores or conventions?*

GARFIELD: Certainly banning some cards will help, but it's difficult to even things out while allowing people to build their own decks. Sealed deck tournaments are fun (the sponsor of the tournament makes up the decks), so you use the same decks over and over.

VANTAGE: *Sort of like duplicate bridge tournaments?*

GARFIELD: Yes. Another choice is to allow decks that contain only common cards. Or you can sell sealed starter decks, or allow people to make up their own psuedo-starter deck: 2 rare cards, 13 uncommon cards, and 45 common cards for each player, allowing only revised cards in the deck. Another interesting wrinkle is to auction off specific cards part-way through a tournament.

VANTAGE: *That would certainly be a good way to raise money for a charity, and leave players second-guessing each other on which cards could best help their decks. Let's switch topics for a bit and talk about another Deckmaster game,* ***Jyhad.*** *That game is based on White Wolf's* ***Vampire: The Masquerade.*** *Did that come about as a result of Lisa Stevens?*

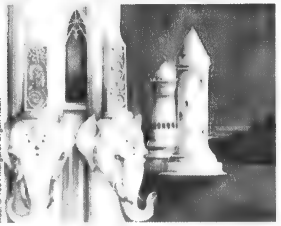
GARFIELD: Lisa is a WOTC employee who was one of the authors of Masquerade, and yes, that is part of the reason we licensed that game.

VANTAGE: *The rules were pretty intimidating (at least the small print was). The game didn't really catch on around here until the players guides showed up.*

GARFIELD: **Jyhad** is more complicated than future games will be. It was aimed more at the hobbyists this time.

VANTAGE: *By hobbyists, you mean people who are playing more games?*

GARFIELD: Sure. People who play role-playing games, board games, and so on. I hope that MTG will work to introduce more people to more kinds of games, that they won't stop with just a card game. **Jyhad** is clearly a complex game. This com-



Illus. © 1994 Margaret Organ-Kean

plexity make for a more interesting game.

VANTAGE: *Why was it so difficult to get starter decks at first?*

GARFIELD: There was a heat wave in Belgium, and the employees at the printer were working in 115-degree temperatures to get the cards out. Because of the order that things were printed in, only 15% of the starter decks were available when we needed them (even though the booster packs were more plentiful).

VANTAGE: *Are unlimited reprints and supplements likely to happen soon?*

GARFIELD: Eventually there may be an expansion set; nothing is scheduled right now.

VANTAGE: *Every time a new set comes out there is what seems like an intolerably long delay before lists of common, uncommon, and rare cards comes out. Can we hope to get lists on a more timely basis?*

GARFIELD: We wanted people to have time to look for new cards, and find out which cards worked best for them. It seems people really want the lists sooner, so in the future we'll be posting them and making them more accessible earlier.

VANTAGE: *What about other collectible card games? How do you feel about them?*

GARFIELD: On the Edge from Atlas Games is probably the sharpest-looking set so far. **Illuminati** from Steve Jackson Games has nice cards and a marvelous sense of humor. I was in an impressive play-test of the game. **Sim City** from Mayfair Games is clearly the most different game. I'm curious to see how they convert the computer game to a card game. **Spellfire** from TSR is a good introductory game. I've played the **Star Trek** game some. It does a great job of capturing the flavor of the shows. What I'm most pleased about is that every one of these games is unique — none of them is a blatant rip-off of **MTG.**

VANTAGE: *What other upcoming projects can you tell us about?*

GARFIELD: I'd like to do a reprint and maybe an expansion for **Robo Rally.** We also have a license from R. Talsorian Games to do **Net Runner,** a cyberpunk game.

VANTAGE: *Are you doing a lot of conventions now?*

GARFIELD: Yes. I just got back from one in Europe, and I'm going to another one this weekend and another the weekend after that.

VANTAGE: *I guess we were lucky to catch you, then. Thanks for the time!*

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THE VIEW FROM OBLIVION

By Corey Bond

Neither company wants to discuss the sticker price, but the rumor swinging around on the grapevine is that Marvel picked up Malibu for a cool nine million dollars.

What we are talking about here is your bargain basement discount comic company ... Terry Stewart probably slapped that puppy on his VISA Gold Card. Nine million? If that figure is anywhere in the ball park, then Marvel got a considerably better deal than Acclaim did.

Acclaim purchased Voyager/Valiant earlier this year for 65 million bucks. Considering that Malibu is the fourth-ranked comic publisher, and Valiant is the sixth (after Dark Horse), one has to wonder whether Marvel got lucky or Acclaim got reamed.

For you number crunchers out there, here is an excerpt from Diamond Comic Distributors' Top Ten Publisher Dollar Market Shares for November '94: Marvel 32.7%, Malibu 5.28%, Valiant 4.32%.

The ironic twist to Marvel's acquisition is the fact that the buy-out went down while Malibu was in the middle of publishing the Hostile Takeover storyline in its Ultraverse titles. I guess the editors at Malibu must have seen the writing on the wall.

"Hostile Takeover" (which runs through **Prototype** #13, **Nightman** #12, **Solitaire** #10, **Solution** #13, and **Giant-Size Prototype** #1) tells the story of the Ultras' involvement in the corporate machinations that ensue when "NuWare" sets out to seize the assets of the unstable "UltraTech" company. In the end, UltraTech chairman Gordon Bell blows up the corporate headquarters to keep them from falling into the hands of NuWare's J.D. Hunt.

I'm sure that Marvel is grateful that Malibu founder Scott Rosenberg opted not to destroy the Malibu offices to keep them out of the hands of Stan Lee, who needs those West Coast facilities to launch his Excelsior imprint.

Not that what went down with Malibu could be classified as a hostile takeover. On the contrary, Malibu had been freely offered on the market for weeks. The only real question was who would get to take it home.

Although it is common knowledge that Marvel and DC were engaged in a bidding war for Malibu, there are rumors that four other players were also involved in the game: Sony, Paramount, Fox, and GameTag. Obviously, these companies believed that they had a lot to gain from acquiring Malibu. After all, Malibu (or, these days, the Malibu branch or Marvel) does have considerable holdings:

Hostile Takeover logo ™ & © 1994 Malibu Comics Entertainment, Inc

"Are you ever going to turn on the TV on Saturday morning and catch the first episode of 'The Mutants'?"

the **Ultraverse,** the creator-owned Bravura imprint, the licensing for **Star Trek: Deep Space Nine, Mortal Kombat,** and **BattleTech.**

Rather, I believe that the clues to Marvel's underlying goal can be found in their own press release, wherein they discuss how the Marvel-Malibu conglomerate represents "approximately a 40% unit share of the total comic book market."

Whatever Marvel is announcing that they stand to gain from the Malibu buy-out — an UltraForce animated TV series, video game licensing, etc. — the bottom line is that they did it to gain a larger portion of the market share pie. In other words, I think that Marvel's company policy can be summed up in the tag line that ran with all of Malibu's ads for the "Hostile Takeover" storyline: "Whoever dies with the most toys wins."

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While we are on the topic of Marvel, let's discuss the X-Men (described in the aforementioned Marvel press release as "the most popular Super Hero group in comics," and who am I to argue?). As a retailer, I am once again besieged with customer questions about what the final fate of their favorite characters will be after they are "killed off."

To reflect these changing times, new X-titles will be brought forth to replace the old. For example, **The Mutants: The Amazing X-Men** and **The Mutants: The Astonishing X-Men** will take the place of the two X-Men titles. The cheesiest change, and therefore (in my opinion) the most wonderful, would have been the transformation of **X-Force** into **X-Posse,** but it seems that Marvel thought better of it and opted for **Gambit and the X-Ternals** instead.

Anyway, as I was saying, this announcement from Marvel has resulted in my being asked, on a daily basis, whether or not the change will be permanent. My response? "Are you ever going to turn on the TV on Saturday morning and catch the first episode of 'The Mutants'?" No. "Are you ever going to walk into Wal-Mart and find the new line of 'The Mutants' action figures on the toy shelves?" No.

And why not? *Licensing* — the use of the X-Men logo and concept for non-comic merchandise. "X-Men" is an established name and cash cow for Marvel. They cannot afford to fudge with it.

The readers who are concerned about this "After Xavier" storyline are the same ones who had anxiety attacks and went into early mourning when Superman died, as though he wouldn't be back stronger than ever; the same ones who cheered when the Joker killed the Jason

Todd Robin, as though he wouldn't be replaced by the even-more-annoying Tim Drake Robin (how many orphans are there in Gotham City who look exactly like Dick Grayson?).

These people simply do not understand the business factors behind these storylines, and the necessity of preserving the status quo. Comic companies kill popular characters to increase sales, but must bring them back to life in order to retain their licensing value for movies, TV shows, action figures, video games, and Underoos, which is where the real money is. (You don't think Marvel, DC, Sony, Paramount, Fox, and GameTag were all fighting over Malibu because their comics were making money, do you?).

If you want to read a highly entertaining fictionalized account of how this phenomenon operates, go to your local comic shop and pick up a copy of Rick Veitch's BratPack. It's a great story that satirizes the existence of super-hero sidekicks in general, and the DIAL-1-800-KILL-ROBIN "Death in the Family" storyline from the Batman comic in particular.

Which brings me to a really outdated point. I still think that the phone-in death of Robin was unfair, especially considering how close the tallied votes were. Why? Because I know, from a psychological profile point of view, that the sane, rational, compassionate readers who voted for Jason to live called only once, while the sadistic, psychotic readers who voted for him to die probably maxed out their AT&T phone cards calling over and over again to make sure the little brat was toast.

Admit it. There's blood on your touch-tone.

X-Men ™ & © 1995 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc.

Robin ™ & © 1995 DC Comics

(Corey Bond, still living in Oblivion, does believe that there will be one permanent effect of the "Age of Apocalypse" storyline. The Wolverine from the darker alternate reality will cross over and replace the one in the regular Marvel Universe. That way we will once again be blessed with an even darker and grittier Wolverine, and Voilà!, his adamantium will still be intact. You heard it here first.)

"How many orphans are there in Gotham City who look exactly like Dick Grayson?"

VANTAGE VIEWPOINTS

13000 W. Blue Mound Rd, Suite #110, Elm Grove, WI 53122

Dear Vantage Viewpoints,

What has happened to Triumphant? Last I heard they were getting help from a big investor. Now they've fallen off the face of the earth (and various other planets). You seemed close with them. So what's the deal?

Ron Anselowitz
Orlando, FL

Read on, Ron ...

Dear Vantage Viewpoints,

Just wanted to write to you again and let you know that I enjoy your magazine immensely. I read issue number 6 and would like to reply to the Fall of Triumphant article. As your article states, there are a number of people who were stiffed out of money by this company. I (probably with a number of other people) was ripped off as well. As you may or may not know, Triumphant had a coupon promotion in which you sent a copy of the coupons along with $2.00 in order to receive a special edition comic of that particular title. When I sent in for **Riot Gear** #0, I received a check for $2.00 and a note telling me that they could not fill the order at the present time. The problem is that when I tried to cash this check, I was told that it could not be processed due to insufficient funds. I certainly hope that there is something that can be done to resolve these matters.

I would also like to see what can be done for send-away promotions by the comic industry. I think it is a cool gimmick; however, it is very frustrating to send in your money and have these people take their sweet time sending you what you buy. The check always clears the bank in a timely manner, but their shipping schedule to allow 8-12 weeks for delivery, for one reason or another, ends up turning into 4 to 6 months.

You are in an influential position to ask these people, "Doesn't the customer come first?" Oh well, at least I know I can count on **Vantage**!

David Ganaway
Huntsville, AL

David, we don't know what can be done about those Triumphant promotions. We were perhaps closer to the people at Triumphant than most other mags in the industry, but we have no idea where they are today. The whole thing shut down rather abruptly, with little to no warning. We think they were good people who got in over their heads and then had to bail out without making good on some of their debts. It's a sad situation. As for those coupons, we know that the sales/marketing people at the various publishers often read ***Vantage,*** *so maybe they'll take your advice.*

Hey, as part of our ***Amazing Spider-Man*** *#150 contest we asked for your dream crossover, what you think of this month's news, what you're having for dinner tonight, or some other pointless drivel. Here's what you had to say ...*

Lady Death chromium cards = incredible art, beautiful cards/ Olivia chrome cards = excellent.
— Charles Simpson, Romeoville, IL

My comment is: Keep up the great work!
— Anthony Galuzzo, East Haven, CT

I don't have enough money to buy comics other than for reading. I have fun picking future picks, though, and seeing how it all pans out.
— Joshua B. Wise, Terre Hill, PA

Being a silver age lover, how about more silver age stuff in your top picks (if possible). Dream crossover — Wolverine & Deathblow. Keep it up. Love your mag! My prediction — the clone is the real thing! Do you read all of these?
— Mike Parks, Idaho Falls, ID

Yes, we read all of them. They're great because no two are ever alike. We're working on bringing you more oldies stuff, Mike. Let us know how we do.

My dream crossover would be Helina vs. Lady Death.
— Rumeet Patel, Prayton Valley, AB

Evil Ernie vs. Jonah Hex. David still reading comics (as usual). Peace! Don't wear fur.
— David Schumacher, Wheat Ridge, CO

I enjoy your information. Keep up the good work.
— Marque L. Glisson, Pacifica, CA

Last night I had pressed duck with pea pods and a spicy sauce. The duck was nice & crispy but just a little on the greasy side. The pu pu platter was excellent.
— Ace Willie, Beloit, WI

Good Chinese food can be hard to come by in Wisconsin. They've got great magazines that are published in Wisconsin, though.

My dream crossover: Valkyrie (Airboy fame) meets the Huntress. I would like to have Lady Death for dinner. Ultraverse needs better artists (except for The Strangers).
— Joseph Peller, Brooklyn, NY

That's it for this month. We hope to have room to print more of your comments next month. Send 'em to: Vantage Viewpoints, 13000 W. Blue Mound Road, #110, Elm Grove, WI 53122. Hey, a big congratulations to James Futado of Millbrook, AL for winning the super-limited ***X-O Manowar*** *#0 Gold Edition! Plus, a big Way To Go goes out to Anthony Baré of Culver City, CA, the lucky winner of our awesome* ***Amazing Spider-Man*** *#149 contest!*

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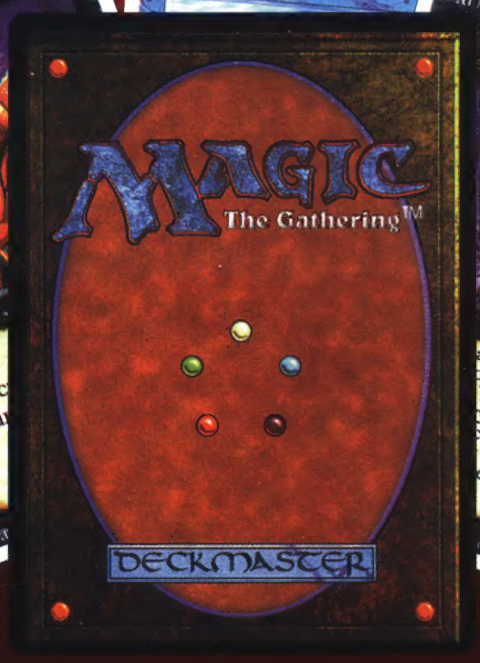

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